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RIOT LOOTERS NOT CRIMINALS  
IN USUAL SENSE.  
DISASTER EXPERTS SAY

St. Louis, Mo., May 1, 1968--Most looters are not criminals preying on disorder for personal profit.

This is the argument made by the co-directors of the Disaster Research Center of Ohio State University in an article in Trans-action, a national magazine of social science published at Washington University.

The authors, Russell Dynes and E. L. Quarantelli, have studied looting in both natural disasters--hurricanes, tornadoes, floods, etc.--and in civil disturbances, primarily riots.

They found that very little looting takes place after natural disasters. Officials expect looting and guard against it; there are often many reports of looting, but looting victims are hard to find, the authors say. In fact, crime often goes down during a natural disaster.

Reports of looting after storms and floods come from a misinterpretation of what other people are doing, they assert. Many people engaged in search and rescue are taken for looters, as are souvenir hunters, and people accepting freely offered relief supplies.

There is some looting in disasters, but it is rare, and it almost always is done by outsiders. In riots, however, looting is common, they say, and it is almost always carried out by residents.

Looting in riots is different in other ways. Looters in disasters are strongly condemned, but "The 'carnival atmosphere' observed in the Newark and Detroit disturbances did not represent anarchy; it represented widespread social support," according to the article.

Dynes and Quarantelli say that looters in riots do not consider themselves criminals, as the few disaster looters do. They share what they have taken and continue to loot in the presence of police and television cameras. The authors argue that looters are in effect saying that they "want what they consider their fair share--and that they will resort to violence to get it."

The authors conclude, "The basic question now is whether American community leaders can or will recognize that such looting is more than 'pointless' or criminal' behavior. If they do, it may mark the beginning of a new political dialogue, in which the outsiders in our urban communities can express their desires nonviolently to the insiders who will have finally learned to listen."

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